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Military Officers Visit School

By Aesha Duval, Staff writer

HOPE MILLS -- Capt. Matthew Richardson of the Australian Army entertained John Griffin Middle School students Thursday with stories of catching huge snakes.

"Australia isn't just what you see on 'Survivor'," he told his audience during lunch.

The school hosted 19 active-duty international military officers as part of the six-week Civil Affairs and the Psychological Officers courses at the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School on Fort Bragg.

"The kids are really friendly, and I'm glad I can represent my country," Richardson said.

The officers were given the opportunity to experience the American education system and observe how it works.

Dressed in their country's military uniforms, the officers visited students in class and ate lunch with them. The officers came from Nepal, Belgium, Surinam, Lesotho, Singapore, Australia, Egypt, Kenya, Canada, Malaysia, Greece, Italy and St. Vincent.

"They are happy children, just like the children back home," Lt. Lea Parris of the Surinam Army said. "I was very impressed with the way they involve the children in the education programs."

Lt. Col. Albert Sim of the Singapore Army said he was most impressed with the courses being taught.

"The classes are very well-rounded and cover a broad range of information," Sim said.

The international military student office coordinated the tour. The officers also visited the Cumberland County Jail. They plan to attend a City Council meeting and to take a trip to Charleston, S.C.

Bette Franken, the office chief, said the JFK center hoped to show that America is not all military.

"Their views of America are often what they see in movies and on television," Franken said. "We want to change that and help them to get involved in their communities."

Richardson told students that instead of Kentucky Fried Chicken, they had Kentucky fried snake in Australia.

"I was joking, of course," Richardson said.